

Testimony Public Health Committee March 18, 2015

My name is Stephen Herzog. My wife's name is Susan.

We're originally from New York but before we moved to Connecticut we lived in California.

In both New York City and LA restaurants have letter grades in the front window. People usually won't eat at a restaurant unless it is graded A. Restaurants with a B will address whatever issues they need to in order to get that A.

This system does not exist in Connecticut. No one really may pay attention until you or someone you know contracts a food-borne illness.

On December 27th 2014, I awoke to find Susan looking very jaundiced. She had difficulty walking as well as cognitive issues. We went to our doctor who sent us to the ER so we could get test results ASAP. Susan was admitted to the ICU and they told me they were treating her with IV antibiotics for colitis.

I called our longtime doctor in NY who ended up telling me (and I'll never forget his words) "If you don't get Susan out of Windham Hospital she will perish." It turned out that she had HUS, hemolytic eurythmic syndrome, brought on by e coli poisoning. Her red blood cells were exploding, her platelet count dropped and her kidneys ceased functioning. He told the attending physician that she would die unless she received plasmapheresis at Hartford Hospital ASAP. Just prior to being LifeStarred to Hartford Susan experienced a gran mal seizure and flat lined. They brought her back and she spent nearly 3 weeks in ICU in Hartford. Early in her stay the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) called me to confirm the diagnosis. They asked me if we had eaten at a specific restaurant in December and we had.

While DPH thoroughly investigated the Willimantic e coli outbreak (6 others were hospitalized), the results of the investigation were only published online in July, in a DPH publication, with the names of the restaurants redacted. They determined that 2 different restaurants had exposed people to e coli poisoning. There was very little news coverage as well. While Susan finally recovered by mid-summer, she was forced to retire early. We engaged an attorney from a firm specializing in food-borne illness. He recently told us that he was unable to pursue this case any further because the state of Connecticut makes it very difficult for the victims of food-borne illness to obtain information. He said we had no recourse.

We need to have information regarding food-borne illness flow more freely in Connecticut. We need to grade restaurants here in Connecticut. The only way people will be responsible is if they are accountable. We hope that today will be a new beginning in such accountability.